

# Lowland Heathland



## **Description**

Lowland Heathland is generally found below 300m on poor nutrient, acid soil with a pH of 4 to 5.5. The habitat is characterised by ericaceous plants such as Heather and Bell Heather with scattered trees and shrubs of mainly Silver Birch, Oak and Gorse. Parts of the habitat may retain damp areas and small pools that are important for associated plants such as Cottongrass and also for Dragonflies, Green Hairstreak, Bumble Bee, Linnet and Brown Hare and a wide range of invertebrates. Often this mix of Dry Heath, Wet Heath and occasional pools create a rich and diverse habitat which supports other important plant species, including Lichens and Mosses.

## **National Status**

This is an internationally rare and threatened habitat with the UK holding 20% of the world's total. There has been a 75% decline of Lowland Heathland cover in Britain since 1800. Various sites in this country hold some very rare species of plants and invertebrates.

## **Local Status**

Records exist in Barnsley of some 19 examples, some of which are quite small and isolated and may not be original, but rather recent heather colonisation. The historical and most species-rich site in Barnsley is Gypsy Marsh near Broomhill, which is owned by Barnsley MBC, designated as a Local Nature Reserve, and managed by the RSPB.

## **Legal Status**

Sites included in the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) as Natural Heritage Sites (NHS) have a presumption against development, but have no protection against operations which do not require planning consent.

The DEFRA Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) Regulations may apply.

## **Links with other Action Plans**

SAP1	Hedgehog
SAP2	Bats
SAP7	Kestrel

### **Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline**

- In the past Lowland Heathland was lost to agriculture, forestry, mineral extraction and development.
- Uncontrolled burning in some areas has caused habitat destruction and allowed other species to encroach.
- Nutrient enrichment from surrounding land has had an effect on bordering vegetation.
- Possible threat from the Heather Beetle (lowland sites are particularly vulnerable).

### **Current Local Action**

- Gypsy Marsh, owned by Barnsley MBC, is managed as a Local Nature Reserve by the RSPB.
- Recording on site by Barnsley Naturalist Society, Barnsley Bird Study Group, RSPB and other interested individuals.
- Other sites may be recorded by the same groups and individuals.

### **Proposed Local Action**

- Create new areas of Lowland Heathland on suitable sites in partnership with the Coalfields Heathland Project and various landowners.
- Encourage participation among farmers in Environmental Stewardship and Countryside Stewardship Schemes.
- Continue to monitor the population of Brown Hare and encourage appropriate management.
- Extract information from the *Barnsley Bird Study Group Breeding Bird Survey* to provide populations and mapping of breeding Linnet.
- Encourage the management of Lowland Heathland to benefit Bumble Bees.
- Extract any past records, survey and monitor for Adder.

### **BMBC Planning Policy Actions**

- Designate Natural Heritage Sites (NHS) and declare Local Nature Reserves (LNR) on appropriate areas of Lowland Heathland habitat, or instigate other appropriate measures for their protection.
- Encourage the creation of new habitat through the requirement made under Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 9, to incorporate biodiversity enhancements into development wherever possible.

### **BMBC Development Control Actions**

- Through planning control or other land use consultation processes, allow no further loss of areas of Lowland Heathland habitat and seek opportunities to enhance existing areas and create new areas through approved development.